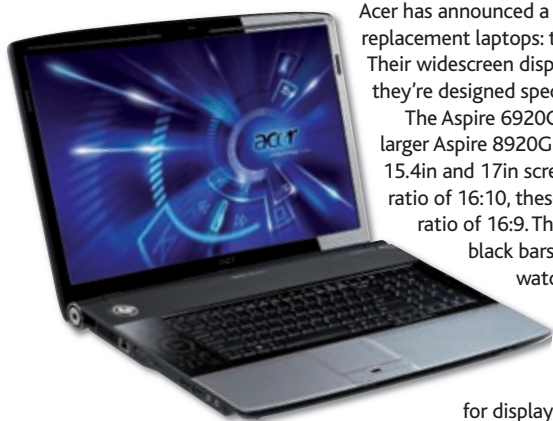




First looks

Every month we bring you sneak previews of the latest kit from www.computershopper.co.uk

New Acer entertainment laptops



Acer has announced a new range of desktop replacement laptops: the Aspire Gemstone Blue. Their widescreen displays have unusual sizes, as they're designed specifically with video in mind.

The Aspire 6920G has a 16in display, and the larger Aspire 8920G an 18.3in display. Unlike 15.4in and 17in screens, which have an aspect ratio of 16:10, these monitors have an aspect ratio of 16:9. That means you won't see black bars at the top or bottom when watching widescreen TV shows and many movies.

The 8920G's 18.3in screen has a resolution of 1,920x1,080 pixels – perfect for displaying 1080p HD video – and a

Blu-ray drive is included as standard. The 8920G will also have five discrete speakers for 5.1 surround sound on the go.

The smaller 16in 6920G lacks the 5.1 speakers, but the flagship model will have a resolution of 1,920x1,080. Lesser models will be limited to displaying 720p video. The cheapest £700 including VAT model won't have a Blu-ray drive, either.

Depending on specifications, the 6920G will cost between £699 and £1,150, while the 8920G ranges from £900 to £1,400 including VAT. All Gemstone Blue models will use Nvidia's new GeForce 9000M-series graphics chips. Optional extras include remote controls and integrated TV tuners.

Unlike Acer's previous beige and black Gemstone laptops, these new models have an understated silver and black design. Both the 6920G and 8920G will have a touch-sensitive panel of buttons for controlling video and music playback. They should be on sale in a few weeks.

Polaroid's new printing technology

Polaroid, synonymous with instant photos since the 1940s, is the first company to release a Zero-Ink (ZINK) photo printer. ZINK photo printing is an ink-free system that uses heat to activate crystals of cyan, magenta and yellow dye embedded in specially developed paper. The crystals are colourless until activated and different shades are created by exposing them to differing temperatures for varying durations. A polymer overcoat layer protects photos, making them water- and scratch-resistant, while an adhesive back can be peeled away to turn them into stickers.

Polaroid's Instant Mobile Printer can produce only 3x2in photos, which take just under a minute to print. The printer itself is tiny, measuring just 120x72x24mm, which is little bigger than a compact digital camera. It's powered by a rechargeable lithium-ion battery and can be connected to a camera via USB or print photos sent from a Bluetooth camera phone.

Although small, the photos compared well with prints from the best inkjet and dye-sub printers in our recent compact photo printer Labs (*Shopper 242*). The level of detail was generally excellent, particularly in intricately patterned areas. Our first impression was that some shades looked slightly dull, but we were particularly impressed by the quality of blacks.

Polaroid's Instant Mobile Printer is due to be launched in the UK in time for summer, and will cost £99 including VAT. ZINK paper will cost £3 for 10 sheets and £7 for 30. There are plans to release larger-format printers using ZINK technology, but no firm release dates have yet been set.



First Blu-ray home cinema system

Blu-ray's victory over HD DVD should cause a sharp rise in sales of high-definition movies, so Panasonic has timed the release of its SC-BT100 well. It's the first true all-in-one Blu-ray home cinema system, as a previous effort from Sony simply bundled a standalone

player and amplifier. The main unit is compact and sits on a stylish integrated base. The centre section of the

fascia hinges down to form an iPod dock. You can control your iPod using the SC-BT100's remote control through an interface on your TV, or switch your TV off and control the iPod directly. Both audio and video content will play through the dock. The rear of the unit has an optical input for connecting other digital audio sources, along with HDMI and component outputs.

Blu-ray playback supports the Final Standard Profile, with its extra features such as book-marking scenes. However, there's no network port for accessing online content. As well as playing Blu-ray movies, it will upscale DVDs to 1080p. The decoder

supports surround-sound standards such as Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HS Master Audio.

The SC-BT100 comes with three main speakers and a subwoofer. You can add optional rear speaker packages to create a 5.1 or 7.1 setup. Wireless adaptors are also available. Sound quality was impressive when demonstrated in the full 7.1 configuration. Dialogue was clear, the subwoofer blended well with the main speakers and, with a rating of 1,500W RMS, there's certainly more power than most users will ever need.

The flexible speaker configurations and iPod compatibility impressed us, and the SC-BT100's seems ideal for the casual movie fan. It should be available in June, and will cost £699 including VAT. **CE**

